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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 001368

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NEA FOR BURNS/SATTERFIELD
NEA/SA/EX FOR AUSTIN-FERGUSON; DEPT FOR DS/IP/NEA;
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SUBJECT: THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND: MARCH 4, 2004 (1400 HOURS LOCAL) -- IDF INCURSION INTO RAFAH LEAVES 12-YEAR-OLD BOY DEAD; FOUR OTHER PALESTINIANS WOUNDED

THIS IS A JOINT MESSAGE FROM EMBASSY TEL AVIV AND CONGEN JERUSALEM.

11. (SBU) Summary: A 12-year-old boy was shot and killed March 4 during an IDF incursion into the Zorub section of the Rafah refugee camp to search for tunnels used to smuggle weapons. Four others, including three more children between the ages of eight and 11, were wounded. One Palestinian was killed and 11 others, reportedly members of his family, were wounded March 4 in Rafah when an explosive device the man was assembling detonated prematurely. In the West Bank, the IDF is conducting an investigation, ongoing as of 1630, into an explosion in Kifl Haris village that may have been caused by a suicide bomber whose charge detonated prematurely. An Israeli motorist was lightly wounded March 3 when a roadside bomb exploded as she was driving on Route 60 near Bayt Ummar village. End Summary.

West Bank

12. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Death: An explosion in Kifl Haris village around 1430 hours led to rumors that the blast was caused when a suicide bomber on his way to Israel exploded prematurely. The story was not confirmed at 1630 hours. Reports indicated that the IDF was looking for the source of the blast.

-- Injury: An Israeli motorist was lightly injured March 3 when a roadside bomb blew up as she drove down Route 60 near Bayt Ummar village. The rear of the car was severely damaged.

-- Bomb: Molotov cocktails were thrown March 3 at Jewish-owned houses in Jerusalem, s Old City. No one was injured.

-- Bomb: Palestinians March 3 threw a firebomb at an Israeli motorist's car in Hebron. No one was injured.

-- Shooting: Gunmen fired at the Bayt Jala DCO, s office around midnight between March 3 and 4. No one was injured.

13. (SBU) ARRESTS:

-- The IDF March 3 arrested 11 Palestinians throughout the West Bank.

-- The IDF March 4 arrested three Palestinians during an raid in Jenin.

14. (SBU) DEMOLITIONS:

-- The Israeli High Court rejected a petition filed by Palestinians asking the court to block the planned demolition of two houses along "Worshippers, Way," between Kiryat Arba and Hebron.

Gaza Strip

15. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Deaths/Injuries: Israeli media reported that one Palestinian, reportedly a member of the Popular Resistance Committee, was killed March 4 in Block N of the Rafah refugee camp after the bomb he was assembling exploded prematurely. Also injured in the blast were 11 others, two seriously, according to UNRWA (see "Explosions").

-- Death/Injuries: UNRWA reported that a 12-year-old Palestinian boy was shot and killed March 4 during an exchange of fire that broke out during an IDF incursion into

the Rafah refugee camp. Four others, including three children between the ages of eight and 11, were also wounded (see "Incursions/Demolitions").

-- Injuries: One settler was injured March 4 when a rocket, reportedly a Qassam, was fired on Netzarim, according to Israeli media.

-- Catch-up item: Injury: A Palestinian was shot in the foot when the IDF exchanged fire with Palestinian gunmen near Neve Dekalim March 2, according to UNRWA.

-- Mortars/Rockets: The IDF reported that two anti-tank missiles were fired at Kfar Darom settlement March 3 and one anti-tank missile was fired at an IDF outpost west of Khan Yunis March 4.

-- Shootings: The IDF reported a total of seven shooting attacks March 4: three near Khan Yunis, three near Rafiah Yam, and one at an IDF outpost south of Rafah.

-- Explosions: UNRWA reported that three houses were totally destroyed and 22 others were damaged March 4 in Block N of the Rafah refugee camp, when a bomb being prepared by Awni Kollab, reportedly a member of the Popular Resistance Committee, exploded prematurely. Awni was killed and 11 others, reportedly family members, were wounded in the blast.

-- Catch-up item: Explosions: UNRWA reported that a homemade bomb and two Molotov cocktails were thrown into the courtyard of the UNRWA girls elementary school in Jabaliya refugee camp March 2, just after the students had returned to their classes after recess. No injuries or damage was reported when the bomb exploded, and PA police successfully removed the two unexploded Molotov cocktails.

16. (SBU) INCURSIONS/DEMOLITIONS:

-- UNRWA reported a large IDF incursion into the Zorub area of the Rafah refugee camp March 4, reportedly to search for tunnels used to smuggle weapons. A 12-year-old Palestinian boy was shot and killed, and four others, including three children between the ages of eight and 11, were wounded. An unknown number of buildings were destroyed. As of 1500 hours, the operation was ongoing.

-- UNRWA reported that exchanges of gunfire erupted March 3 in the al-Salam quarter of the Rafah refugee camp when 12 IDF tanks and APCs, accompanied by four bulldozers, entered the area to level previously demolished houses. No injuries were reported.

17. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/CHECKPOINTS

-- Route Four (Salahadeen Road), the main north-south traffic artery, was open for Palestinians March 4.

-- Erez Crossing was open March 4, and 9,064 Palestinian laborers crossed into Israel. All workers must be married and over age 35. The Erez Industrial Zone was also open, with 3,053 workers entering the Zone for work March 4.

-- Sufa Crossing was open for Palestinian workers March 4 and 348 workers crossed. Sufa was also open March 4 for the import into Gaza of aggregates used in construction.

-- Catch-up data for Sufa: On March 3, 306 laborers crossed into Israel.

-- Karni Terminal was open March 4 for the import and export of goods into the Gaza Strip.

-- Rafah Terminal was open for Palestinian travelers March 4.

-- Tel al-Sultan checkpoint was closed March 4. Toufah checkpoint was open for residents of al-Mowassi.

Israel

18. (SBU) Israeli media reported that two Israeli Arab brothers, reportedly senior activists in the Sons of the Village movement, were arrested March 4 in the Galilee village of Arabe on suspicion of contacts with Hizballah. The two are also accused of supplying electrical appliances and instructions for bomb-making to Popular Front activist Anas Abdel-Aziz, after allegedly being recruited by a member of the Abu Musa Fatah faction.

19. (SBU) Israeli media reported that the Haifa District Court sentenced two Israeli-Arabs from the village of Kfar Manda to 20 years apiece, and a third man to 14 years for conspiring to carry out terror attacks in Israel.

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KURTZER